Oriental Bittersweet

Celastrus orbiculatus Thunb.

DESCRIPTION: Oriental bittersweet is native of Eastern Asia, Korea, China and Japan. It is a deciduous, woody, perennial vine or trailing shrub known also as round-leaved and Asiatic bittersweet. Leaves of oriental bittersweet are glossy, rounded, finely toothed and arranged alternately along the stem. Clusters of small greenish flowers emerge from leaf axils, allowing each plant to produce large numbers of seeds. At maturity, globular, green to yellow fruits split open to reveal three red-orange, fleshy arils that contain the seeds. These showy fruits have made oriental bittersweet very popular for use in floral arrangements.

ECOLOGICAL THREAT: Oriental bittersweet is an aggressive invader that threatens all vegetation levels of forested and open areas. It grows over other vegetation, completely covering it, and kills other plants by preventing photosynthesis, girdling, and uprooting by force of its massive weight. In the northeastern U.S., exotic Oriental bittersweet appears to be displacing the native climbing bittersweet, *Celastrus scandens*, which occurs in similar habitats, through competition and hybridization.

DISTRIBUTION IN THE UNITED STATES: Oriental bittersweet currently occurs from New York to North Carolina, and westward to Illinois.

HABITAT IN THE UNITED STATES: Oriental bittersweet infests forest edges, woodlands, early succession fields, hedgerows, coastal areas and salt marsh edges, particularly those suffering some form of land disturbance. While often found in more open, sunny sites, its tolerance for shade allows oriental bittersweet to invade forested areas.

CURRENT MANAGEMENT APPROACHES: Where hand labor is practical, vines can be pulled out by the roots and removed from the site, preferably before fruiting. If fruits are present, vines should be bagged and disposed of in a landfill, or left in the bags and allowed to bake in the sun long enough to kill the seeds. Herbicides, such as glyphosate (e.g., Roundup) or triclopyr (e.g., Garlon) have been used successfully. These herbicides are taken into the roots and kill the entire plant.

REFERENCES: http://plants.usda.gov/ http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/